

Historic STEWARTTOWN

Capital of Esquesing Township

The “capital of Esquesing Township” was a proud epithet maintained by the village of Stewarttown for more than 140 years! In fact the village was called Esquesing for many years. Stewarttown also claims to be the oldest village in the township.

Located on a former native trail, Stewarttown received its first settlers in 1819. Situated in a valley on the west branch of the Credit River on the 7th Line , later called Trafalgar Road, on parts of lots 15 to 17, Concessions 7 and 8, it sits close to the centre of the township.

The earliest settlers were Protestant Irish immigrants: Standish, Beatty, Reed, Randall, Cooke, Graham, Fee, Vance, Morrison, Thompson, and Harrison.

The valley was pioneered by the Young, Randall and Harrison families. James Young built a small grist mill. John and Duncan Stewart settled here in 1842 after emigrating from Ireland. The village was named after these entrepreneurs. .



Esquesing Historical Society p465

Esquesing’s first post office was opened at the home of Henry Fyfe at Lot 9, Con 7 in 1820. About 1840 it was moved into Esquesing Village. Beginning about 1846 the name Stewarttown was used but the post office always retained the name of Esquesing. The post office closed after rural delivery was introduced about 1920.

The first meeting of Esquesing Township was held at the home of Joseph Standish on New Year’s Day, 1821. A Town clerk, assessor, collector, wardens and postmasters were elected. The annual meetings were held in various homes until 1830, when they moved south on Trafalgar Road to “Long Tom’s” Inn on Lot 14.

Taverns were the venue of choice thereafter. In 1849 a public meeting was held to



consider building a Town Hall as a permanent office for the Township. A strong delegation from Georgetown wanted the Hall built there. Some private entrepreneurs had already started building the “Town Hall” in Stewarttown but they were left holding the mortgage. Although the farmers resisted the bid for control no new facility was approved. The Township officers decided to rent premises across the road from the Town Clerk, Richard Tracey. This situation persisted until another vote was held in 1925.

The Township of Esquesing purchased the “Town Hall” across the street, built 75 years previously. This remained the Township office until an award-winning building was

erected in 1962 north of Maple Avenue. Esquesing Township was absorbed into Halton Hills in 1974. The former Township office was used until the opening of the Civic Centre. The old hall was eventually sold to the Georgetown Little Theatre. The building was destroyed by fire in 1998.

TOWNSHIP HALL Built 1850. Remodelled 1948. Burnt 1998.

It was not until 1846 that John Stewart received the patent to his property. He sold it the following year to William Clay and James Young, entrepreneurs from Norval and Georgetown. They focused on flour milling. The mill passed through several owners including Alfred Hood, David McKinnon and Joseph Tweedle. During the Fenian crisis, miller Bill Stokes shut down the mill to permit the men to mount guard against the Fenian threat from the south.



*Stewarttown Flour Mill
Rebuilt in 1908 by Walter Lawson EHS photo 461*

Tweedle sold the mill to Henry Pratt and David Lawson, two brothers from the Scotch Block. The Lawson family continued as owners and sometimes operators of the mill through four generations, including Walter, his son Walter, Robert and Donald Lawson. They sold it in 1962 to Master Feeds. The last of several fires over the years levelled the mill in 1972 when a store was built on the spot.

While the mill was the most long-lived of Stewarttown's businesses, it was but one of many in the village's heyday. Another industry was leather tanning begun by John Stewart and carried on by David Cross. He and another tanner in 1856 supplied five shoemakers, two saddlers and harness makers. There were three wagon makers, two blacksmiths, two butchers and three grocers. There was a livery stable, a cooper, a sawyer, a broom maker, cabinet maker, pump manufacturer, a tailor and a gentleman's clothing shop. James Lindsay and Alexander McKenzie competed in the hotel trade.

The booming village of Stewarttown quickly lost its importance after 1856 when the railway link through Acton and Georgetown opened. Although trade along Trafalgar Road remained important for many more years, the railways attracted more business and the resulting services every year.

The Hamilton and Northwestern Railway opened a line in 1873 and Stewarttown had a small whistle stop and freight siding. It closed about 1953.

Although Stewarttown was the capital of Esquesing, students had to walk quite a distance to school in the early days. Stories of meeting bears on the way to Waterloo or Quatre Bras School were told for many years. School was held in the Orange Hall beginning about 1836 and then in a frame building on the corner of Lot 15, Con. 8,

where the present school is. They replaced it with a brick school house in 1853. A two-storey brick school house was built for SS #6 in 1873 across the road on Lot 15, Con. 7. A lack of pupils prompted the Board to remove the upper storey in 1897. A swelling population had trustees move portables onto the site in 1954. In 1958 they abandoned the site to move back across the road. The modern school served the entire community for a few more years until becoming a middle school for area students, which it still is today.

Wesleyan Methodists travelled first up to Kennedy's meeting house at 20th Side road and after 1833, down to Mount Pleasant on Lot 13, near Long Tom's Tavern. Congregationalists went to Georgetown after 1842 while Presbyterians always travelled down to Boston Church in the Scotch Block until Churches opened at Union, Norval, Limehouse and finally Georgetown.

The village cemetery, begun in 1827 on the south hill overlooking the valley was deeded to the Anglicans who started a church there in 1834. Some members did not like the location so a second church was built on the corner of Lot 15. In 1850 construction began on a new Church on the hill. It was never completed and the wood was used to build a drill shed for the militia behind the Church on Lot 15. The present day school sits on this site. The Mount Pleasant Wesleyan Church was moved to the south-west corner of 15 Sideroad and Trafalgar Road and sold in 1883 to the Anglicans who opened St. John's Church, the only active Church in the village.

The Wesleyan Church on Lot 20 was moved to the base of the cemetery hill in 1871 where it became Loyal Orange Lodge #68. After the upper storey of the Town Hall was condemned, community dances were held here until 1974, when the building was demolished to extend Trafalgar Road through the valley.

Mackenzie's Inn, located at the base of the north of Bunker's hill, was once the preferred meeting place of the Township Council and was the local tavern for years, serving beer brewed in Hornby by the Brain Brothers. The militia's annual "training day" was often held in Stewarttown. It involved some marching, some target practice and a long session at the tavern. The old pine hotel burned down in 1909.

The Esquesing Agricultural Society was formed for township agricultural displays and competition in Stewarttown. Ploughing matches were held on the Bessey farm while the Town Hall was used for displaying the best vegetables and crops. The Fall Fair later alternated between Acton and Georgetown. The Society, founded in 1846, continues to this day as the Georgetown Agricultural Society.



Many Thanks to Lucy Emslie for her assistance.
Pamphlet written by John Mark Benbow Rowe
for the
Esquesing Historical Society
PO Box 51, Georgetown, Ontario, L7G 4T1
1999
ISBN 0-921901-25-9

